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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 001917

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SUBJECT: FIRST PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE 2006 FORUM FOR THE FUTURE

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: At the prepcon for the Forum for the Future, Russian co-chairs pushed for control over the end product of the Forum -- including drafting the Chairman's Summary and attempting to move much of the decision-making on themes to be discussed to an additional prepcon in Moscow in May. Jordan and Bahrain, along with the U.S. and UK, worked closely to limit Russia's problematic suggestions, but we will need to continue close coordination and strong engagement to maintain the Forum for the Future's positive movement and ensure a successful meeting in Amman in early December. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Jordan and Russia co-chaired a meeting in Amman on March 13 with delegations from Bahrain, Germany, Morocco, the United Kingdom and the U.S. to discuss preparations for the 2006 Forum for the Future ("Forum"). The U.S. was represented by the Ambassador, NEA DAS Scott Carpenter, DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, NSC Director Farah Pandith, and NEA/PI Officer Blake Thorkelson. The preparatory conference ("prepcon") participants discussed - subject to confirmation by capitals - holding the Forum at the Dead Sea in Jordan from December 2-3, and a possible prepcon in Moscow at the end of May. A readout of the principal matters addressed is provided below.

3. (SBU) VENUE & DATES: Jordanian FM Abdelelah al-Khatib, who opened the Amman prepcon with Minister of Planning Suheir al-Ali, proposed that the 2006 Forum be held at the King Hussein Conference Center at the Dead Sea - which he asserted could accommodate both governmental meetings and civil society forums - from December 2-3. He asked that the delegations confirm these dates to the GOJ within the next four weeks. Participants responded enthusiastically to the proposed venue, and no delegations voiced serious concern with reference to the dates.

4. (C) CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION: Jordan, Bahrain and Morocco all advocated for continuing the practice of strong NGO participation in the Forum, with the caveat that time limits at the ministerial would need to be taken into account in planning. The GOJ requested a list of prior Forum participants with the understanding that more would be welcome. The U.S. and UK delegations strongly endorsed active civil society participation as "critical" to the Forum's success. Russia attempted to push back, but noted that several Russian NGOs had participated in DAO events and that this had been useful. Unfortunately, the Russian delegation speculated that governments could perhaps choose NGO participants due to time pressures on the program. Reflecting on its experience as host of the 2005 Forum, Bahrain underlined the need for Forum participants to be given clear deadlines for registration, requests to speak, and submission of proposals and amendments.

5. (C) FORUM DECLARATION STATEMENT: Noting the problems encountered in achieving consensus on a final Forum Declaration at the 2005 Forum in Manama, FM Khatib suggested that the group consider the issuance of a "chair summary" at the conclusion of the 2006 Forum, rather than a formal statement. Most delegations reacted positively to this proposal, with the U.S. delegation noting that further outcome documents should be considered at a date closer to the Forum. Germany suggested (as agreed in advance with the U.S. and UK) that perhaps "work plans" on major topics could be issued. Russia supported a "co-chair" summary, pointedly declaring it should be involved in drafting this. The UK responded that a summary issued by the host country only was in line with past precedent.

6. (SBU) JORDANIAN INITIATIVES: Minister al-Ali presented two new proposals to build upon G8-BMENA initiatives. First, she proposed a "youth employment scheme" to tackle the problem of high unemployment among young men and women in the region by helping them get the information, skills and work experience needed to make a successful transition to the workplace. Such a project, according to al-Ali, would complement ongoing vocational training initiatives. The second proposal would establish a "public-private sector matching fund" to promote research and innovation in the region. Al-Ali explained that the proposed fund would partner public and private funds to support research centers and universities in developing useful and marketable technologies. Several delegations, particularly Germany,

reacted positively to the youth employment idea as being responsive to the concerns of civil society. The U.S. agreed that youth employment was a worthwhile theme, but added that it should build upon existing Forum initiatives, not take away from the central focus on civil society and empowerment.

17. (SBU) OVERALL FORUM THEMES: A number of delegations stressed that the 2006 Forum should reinforce initiatives developed at prior Forums in Morocco and Bahrain. Germany and the U.S. highlighted the need to remain focused on reform, with an emphasis on projects achieving a practical impact. The UK urged that the Forum move forward with themes presented by civil society in Manama, such as youth participation, anti-corruption, independent media and the rule of law. At the prepcon conclusion, Jordan noted that there was consensus on "empowerment" as the overall theme for the 2006 Forum, and that this theme was broad enough to build on the work of the two previous Forums while allowing for some new, modest initiatives. The GOJ said that it would prepare and circulate a summary of proposed projects and initiatives for comment if participants forwarded a concept paper for each such proposal.

18. (SBU) FUNDING ISSUES: Jordan stated that it would be "generous" with its limited resources to support the Forum, but added that monetary and in-kind contributions would be greatly appreciated. The GOJ will prepare a tentative Forum budget for distribution to the prepcon delegations. Morocco called on G8 partners to provide financial assistance to host nations of the Forum, and to help ensure participation of cash-strapped NGOs. Morocco also noted that funds were needed to finance Forum initiatives, claiming that several proposals adopted in Bahrain still lacked funding.

19. (SBU) REPORTING AND MINISTERIAL MEETING: The UK said that a "reporting mechanism" for Forum dialogue and initiatives was needed to keep countries and their ministers informed. The British, joined by the U.S., further stressed that the ministerial portion of the Forum was very tight, and that some reporting would be better suited to a senior officials meeting held beforehand.

110. (C) MOSCOW PREPCON AND "COLLOQUIA": Russia announced that it would like to host a prepcon in Moscow at the end of May, or beginning of June, to finalize Forum themes and draft the Forum summary statement, as well as to elaborate on decisions reached at the Amman prepcon. Russia added that it would like to sponsor two "colloquia" to discuss "the regional context" for the BMENA initiative, including (unhelpfully) the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Iraq, Iran and Syria. All other delegations pushed back on the idea of discussing regional conflicts, noting the Forum's focus on reform efforts and stating clearly that there are other, more appropriate venues for these discussions. Russia wants to hold one colloquium in Moscow in June, and a second in St. Petersburg in September. (NOTE: We will need to work with the UK and the Jordanians to kill this problematic proposal. END NOTE.)

111. (C) The Russians also proposed that the Moscow prepcon have a "larger" format than the current meeting, and include representatives from all G8 nations and from more countries in the region. They added that "other countries" outside of the G8 and BMENA had indicated their desire to participate in the Moscow event. DAS Carpenter responded that Forum planning events should be kept small, and that inclusion of "others" already existed at the Forum itself. If the Moscow prepcon were to have a larger format, he continued, it might warrant the inclusion of civil society groups to help flesh out the Forum schedule. Both Jordan and Bahrain cautioned that too many invitees to a possible Moscow prepcon could bog down discussions and hinder consensus on a schedule. They suggested that participants at a Moscow meeting first develop a draft agenda and then present this to other interested parties for comment.

112. (SBU) 2006 G8-BMENA EVENTS: Russia provided a verbal rundown of proposed G8-BMENA events for the current year, and promised to provide a comprehensive electronic list/matrix of these events to each prepcon delegation. The U.S. recommended that the list be posted by Jordan on the Forum website for the benefit of civil society, and further suggested that a permanent central website be created to present all relevant information on Forum and G8-BMENA activities. Jordan replied that it would work to develop such a website, but would need relevant guidance and input from others. The Jordanians added that each host country would need to take over the site's maintenance for its host year.

113. (SBU) 2007 FORUM: As the next president of the G8, Germany said that it was premature at this time to discuss the 2007 Forum. The U.S. agreed, stating that the host of the 2007 Forum should be decided before such planning started. Jordan reminded delegations that the host country

for the 2007 Forum would have to be announced at the Dead Sea in December, thereby requiring efforts to identify a host well beforehand. Germany confirmed that they are actively discussing the issue with possible host nations.

14. (C) COMMENT: Russian suggestions at the prepcon proved problematic on a host of fronts, including proposals to expand invitations to unspecified "other" nations, limiting civil society via government invitation and introducing problematic regional conflict issues via the colloquia they would like to host. The Jordanians pushed back on many of these, with help from the other delegations. We are most concerned, however, that the Moscow prepcon could seriously damage the 2006 Forum, so we will need to work in the next month with the Jordanians and the UK to draft the Chairman's Summary and prepare robust thematic deliverables to head off Russian meddling. END COMMENT.

15. (U) DASs Carpenter and Barks-Ruggles have cleared on this cable.
HALE